Introduction

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The three Scandinavian countries—Denmark, Norway, and Sweden—are understandably often treated as a single area when seen from the outside. Three modern welfare states with very similar languages and a lot of shared, often complicated, history. Norway was under Danish rule for 400 years, ending in 1814, only to have merely relative independence from Sweden for almost another hundred years, gaining full independence in 1905. Denmark and Sweden have been at war numerous times, but now there is only a fair share of good spirited prejudice among the people. The sense of being a culturally integrated area was possibly stronger a century ago, not least in the literary sphere, and the orientation towards a globalizing world takes attention away from the nearby world.

Some of the distinct differences between the nations begin in their landscapes which again has been a significant factor in shaping the cultures: mountains and fjords in Norway, stretched out over more than 2000 kilometers; two thirds of Sweden is covered in forest, while Denmark is mostly farmland in the vicinity of coastal areas. Copenhagen and Stockholm are metropolitan areas with Oslo catching up rapidly, but the sense of being a province on the outskirts of Europe is not just a recurrent theme for the countries as a whole but also internally mirrored in the conflicts between the country and the city.

In this issue, four articles examine overlooked perspectives in Scandinavian literatures' historical engagement with the world outside, while the last three articles deal with contemporary writing that has made its mark recently, both in the popular genre of crime fiction and “Nordic Noir”, and through Karl Ove Knausgård's work that has drawn comparison to Marcel Proust.

There are few hypercanonical Scandinavian authors. Hans Christian Andersen is, thanks to his fairy tales, one of the most translated authors. Modernists Knut Hamsun and August Strindberg could be part of such a conversation, but arguments could also be made against the range of their influence. The numerous performances of Henrik Ibsen's plays around the globe—he is the second most frequently performed playwright after Shakespeare—are a testimony to

a highly esteemed writer. However, while the universality of the subjects Ibsen writes about is easy to establish, Narve Fulsås and Tore Rem show how important the local literary and political context were in shaping the environment in which Ibsen produced his work.

Denmark's involvement in transatlantic slavery has not received the attention it deserves, not even nationally, despite its historical importance. There was substantial engagement in dealing weapons, slaves and sugar in the infamous triangular trade in which Denmark played a minor, but not unimportant, role. Through colonizing the Virgin Islands, which was in possession until 1917 when the islands were sold to the United States, fortunes were made in Denmark through this trade that helped construct monumental buildings in Copenhagen at the cost of immense human suffering. Mads Anders Baggesgaard, the principal investigator of a collective research project that will shed new light on the literary history of transatlantic slave trade and life in the colonies, writes of a little known but original work by a black businessman at St. Thomas of the Virgin Islands, Adolph Sixto. His novel, *Time and I* (1902), is set a hundred years into the future and has the traits of a utopian novel, but it can be read as a struggle to find one's own voice post-slavery and to be part of a literary culture.

Scandinavian ties to the rest of world were, as was the case with other European nations, strengthened through mass emigration in the second half of the Nineteenth century. North America was the primary destination with many enclaves in the mid-West, where the cultural presence of the Scandinavian ancestors is still felt. Paul Ténngart shows how the now mostly overlooked working class literature of the 1920s and 1930s was not only translated but also transformed by the new cosmopolitan situation that the migrants found themselves in. The working-class authors are not just important because of their contributions to a literature that took part in legitimizing the welfare state but also as central figures in the Swedish Academy and members of the Nobel Prize committee.

If not a dominant center of literature in general, at least once a year all eyes turn to Stockholm where the Nobel Prize for literature is announced. The decisions of the Swedish Academy do not always come off as logical or fair, but the prize has been very important as the means of political recognition of writers as well as helping expand the notion of what counts as contemporary world literature. It is only natural that there is more at stake when the Academy chooses to give the prize to a Swedish writer from the not-so-big literary world of a nation of nine million people. Håkan Möller unfolds the process that led to Pär Lagerkvist's award in 1951, which led to a wide, though short-lived, international breakthrough. Even though Lagerkvist had been mentioned as a

candidate earlier, it was the success of his novel *Barabbas*, which was both a bestseller and received favorable international review, that tipped the decision in his favor.

Recently, Scandinavian crime fiction has enjoyed widespread international success. Already in the 1960s the groundwork for a distinct vibe in Scandinavian crime fiction was laid by Per Wahlöö and Maj Sjöwall who combined a classical investigator narrative with strong political engagement. Today, there are numerous internationally bestselling Scandinavian crime writers whose works are also regularly adapted for film and television. Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen shows how global mythologies, in particular Greek, and local settings are intertwined to produce a fascinating mixture of recognition and strangeness. Louise Nilsson takes a different but related approach by showing how the idea of the North permeates the reception of Scandinavian crime fiction; the idea is also emphasized in related visual impressions in book covers and cinematic adaptations which thrive on promoting a certain kind of somber landscape and culturally widespread idea of Scandinavian spirit.

Autofiction has become a transnational phenomenon, sometimes criticized for merely repeating past models, and at other times seen as a sophisticated mode of writing between history and fiction. The most monumental of recent works that plays on the ambiguities of fact and fiction, of merely reporting the past while also interpreting in a rather self-conscious way, is Karl Ove Knausgård's six volume *Min kamp*, translated into English as *My Struggle*, thereby missing the direct reference to *Mein Kampf*. Knausgård's novel tells his own story, which is much about a quotidian life as a young father with limited heroic aspirations. However, as Per Thomas Andersen shows the novel is a portrayal of the emotional geography of the modern welfare state where love, artistic ambitions and family relations are acted out in a transformed setting that lacks the productive resistance of the norms of former times.

Scandinavian countries have long been open to outside impulses and among the foremost in translating literature, yet there are new dynamics between the local and the international, or even global, that becomes visible in an era where national identity is far from irrelevant but also not as unquestionable as it seemed a few generations ago. This opens new paths for literary history as those that have been followed in this issue do.